

THIS MONTH IN THE GARDEN by Peggy Koppmann (photos L. Chimera)

Chilly nights, bonfires, apples and cider, the ubiquitous pumpkin décor on every doorstep, and a sparkle of frost on the last of the vegetable garden mean October has arrived. The warm waters of our lakes and river tend to give us a long autumn so there's plenty of time to enjoy the warmer days and still get your chores done so you can enjoy the season.



Vacation's Over – Those houseplants that have been vacationing on your deck or porch need to come in once nighttime temperatures drop consistently into the 50's. Stop or gradually reduce fertilizing, and be sure to find the optimum light conditions for them gradually reducing light to prevent shock. Give them all a bath to be sure you don't bring in any insect hitchhikers. Cut back on the watering of Christmas cactus to trigger the flowering mechanism called photoperiodism. Find a cooler place in the house and cut their light exposure at night to help produce more abundant flowers for the holidays. Ten hours of light and 14 hours of darkness is recommended.

To (let it) Be or Not To (let it) Be – It's time for the annual debate on how much cleaning up to do in the garden. The "let 'em be" folks leave plants with seed heads for the birds and hollow stems for insects as well as to gather snow to protect plant root systems. The "tidy up folks" cut back now to reduce reseeding, especially cone-

flowers and Black-Eyed Susans. The seeds can also draw the mice and voles that frolic all winter in my grasses unless I cut them back. No matter where you stand in the debate, we can all agree that it's important to clean up and dispose of all diseased material – do not compost it.

Protect and Defend – Cover beets, parsnips, and carrots with a thick layer of mulch towards the end of the month if you're going to harvest into the winter. Do the same with the strawberry and asparagus beds to protect the roots from the cold and encourage the plants to go dormant. Cut back the fronds, stop watering before mulching. The spears will emerge a little later in the spring, but you can pull the mulch back as soon as they start to appear.

Water, Water, Everywhere – Conventional wisdom advises continuing to thoroughly water trees, shrubs, especially evergreens until the ground freezes. An article in *thespruce.com* suggests a different look at the process and calls for stopping watering throughout the early autumn and resuming after deciduous trees have dropped their leaves. The pause in watering allows "trees to enter a transitional phase, not unlike the "hardening off" undergone by nursery plants in spring". Given the crazy weather of the summer and the potential for fall weather that would encourage growth, this bears further research. (*thespruce.com/when-should-i-be-watering-trees-in-fall*)

Winter Wardrobe – Late season plants and vegetables can be protected with horticultural fleece, a lightweight synthetic material that can be used as an alternative to plastic. It can be cut to needed shapes and sizes and does not tend to overheat as some plastics do. Use it for frost protection in spring and fall, to protect tender plants for the winter and protect from drying winds. Lightweight fleece can also be used as an insect barrier during spring pest attacks. All fleece covers must be weighted down in some manner to ensure they don't fly away. For additional information

see learningwithexperts.com/gardening/blog/how-to-use-horticultural-fleece and gardenknowhow.com/garden-how-to/info/how-to-use-garden-fleece. For those of us who store potted plants outdoors for the winter, this has interesting possibilities.

And then – Plant garlic, onion sets, and spinach; turn the compost pile; harvest winter squash; weed; plant bare-root roses; plant sweet pea seeds; plant bulbs for forcing; cut the last bouquets from the garden and bring in to enjoy; visit the farmers market for apples, squash and pumpkins; carve a real Jack-o-Lantern; plant a tree; cover mums and asters when frost threatens; plant winter pansies; make a last application of slug bait; finish dividing and potting perennials for the 2019 Master Gardener Plant Sale and then go get some donuts to enjoy with that cider. 🍷



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